

Thomas Jefferson to John Dickinson, January 13, 1807, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO JOHN DICKINSON J. MSS.

Washington, Jan. 13, 1807.

My Dear and Ancient Friend, —I have duly received your favor of the 1st inst., and am ever thankful for communications which may guide me in the duties which I wish to perform as well as I am able. It is but too true that great discontents exist in the territory of Orleans. Those of the French inhabitants have for their sources, 1, the prohibition of importing slaves. This may be partly removed by Congress permitting them to receive slaves from the other States, which, by dividing that evil, would lessen its danger; 2, the administration of justice in our forms, principles, & language, with all of which they are unacquainted, & are the more abhorrent, because of the enormous expense, greatly exaggerated by the corruption of bankrupt & greedy lawyers, who have gone there from the U. S. & engrossed the practice; 3, the call on them by the land commissioners to produce the titles of their lands. The object of this is really to record & secure their rights. But as many of them hold on rights so ancient that the title papers are lost, they expect the land is to be taken from them wherever they cannot produce a regular deduction of title in writing. In this they will be undeceived by the final result, which will evince to them a liberal disposition of the government towards them. Among the American inhabitants it is the old division of federalists & republicans. The former are as hostile there as they are everywhere, & are the most numerous & wealthy. They have been long endeavoring to batter down the Governor, who has always been a firm republican. There were characters

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superior to him whom I wished to appoint, but they refused the office: I know no better man who would accept of it, and it would not be right to turn him out for one not better. But it is the 2d. cause, above mentioned, which is deep-seated & permanent. The French members of the

Legislature, being the majority in both Houses, lately passed an act declaring that the civil, or French laws, should be the laws of their land, and enumerated about 50 folio volumes, in Latin, as the depositories of these laws. The Governor negatived the act. One of the houses thereupon passed a vote for self-dissolution of the Legislature as a useless body, which failed in the other House by a single vote only. They separated, however, & have disseminated all the discontent they could. I propose to the members of Congress in conversation, the enlisting 30,000 volunteers, Americans by birth, to be carried at the public expense, & settled immediately on a bounty of 160 acres of land each, on the west side of the Mississippi, on the condition of giving two years of military service, if that country should be attacked within 7 years. The defence of the country would thus be placed on the spot, and the additional number would entitle the territory to become a State, would make the majority American, & make it an American instead of a French State. This would not sweeten the pill to the French; but in making that acquisition we had some view to our own good as well as theirs, and I believe the greatest good of both will be promoted by whatever will amalgamate us together.

I have tired you, my friend, with a long letter. But your tedium will end in a few lines more. Mine has yet two years to endure. I am tired of an office where I can do no more good than many others, who would be glad to be employed in it. To myself, personally, it brings nothing but unceasing drudgery & daily loss of friends. Every office becoming vacant, every appointment made, *me donne un ingrat, et cent ennemis*. My only consolation is in the belief that my fellow citizens at large give me credit for good intentions. I will certainly endeavor to merit the continuance of that good-will which follows well-intended actions, and their approbation will be the dearest reward I can carry into retirement.

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God bless you, my excellent friend, and give you yet many healthy and happy years.